

Old State House
Frankfort, Kentucky
Franklin Co.

HABS No.20-1

HABS
KY
37-FRFD,
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 20
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
G. M. Grimes, District Officer
304 Martin Brown Building
Louisville, Kentucky

Name of structure: Old State House

Location: Frankfort, Franklin County, Kentucky

Owner or
custodian: State Custodian of Public Buildings

Address: Frankfort, Kentucky

Date built:
(approx) Begun in Spring, 1827; and
finished in Fall, 1830.

Architect
or builder: Gideon Shryock

Present
condition: Fair; necessary repairs being
neglected.

Number of
stories: Two

Material used
in construction: Exterior: Kentucky marble.
Interior partitions: Brick and frame,
plastered.
Roof: Frame construction covered with
standing seam tin, except dome,
which is copper as originally.
Floors: Marble, wood, cement, linoleum.
The stone flagging and steps of
the portico were covered with
concrete in 1910.

Description:
architectural
and historical The following is a copy of an article
which appeared in "Atkinson's Casket",
a magazine published at Philadelphia,
in December, 1833, page 553. Unfortu-
nately the picture of the building to
which reference is made, had been
removed from the magazine before it
became the property of the Kentucky
Historical Society.

"The annexed beautiful and accurate representation of this building was taken with a Camera Obscura, by Mr. Bramborough, an English artist, who recently passed through Frankfort. The lucid and graphical description which follows, was furnished by Mr. Gideon Shryock, the accomplished architect, who planned the building and superintended its construction.

"This building is situated in the town of Frankfort, near the centre of a public square, which is handsomely covered with blue-grass, and planted with various ornamental trees.

"The front elevation of the building presents a Hexastyle Portico, of the Ionic order, the proportions of which are taken from the temple of Minerva Polias, at Priene, in Ionia.

"The exterior walls presents a smooth surface of polished marble of a light grey colour, obtained from inexhaustible quarries on the banks of the Kentucky River, near Frankfort. The Portico is built of darker grey marble. The columns are four feet in diameter and thirty feet in height, supporting a marble pediment and entablature which is continued entirely around the building. The whole of the roof is covered with copper; from the middle of it arises the cupola, the basement of which is formed by a square pedestal of twenty-five feet on each side; which rises two feet from the apex of the roof; and on which is placed a circular lantern, twenty-two feet in diameter and twenty feet high, surmounted by a hemispherical dome. The flanks of the building have side doors to enter a passage leading across the house; and the rooms appropriated for the Federal Court and Court of Appeals.

"The length of the building, including the Portico, is one hundred and thirty-two feet, its breadth in front is seventy feet. The main entrance is at the south end, by a flight of marble steps extending along the whole of the front, and rising four feet high to the Portico, which projects eleven feet from the front wall of the house.

"The door opens into a vestibule, twenty feet broad and thirty-three feet long; having a committee room of the same size on either side, and a lobby in front leading to the stairway, which is of marble and enclosed by a circular wall, having an entrance in front and on either side, and is lighted from the Cupola above by twelve large windows. The ascent is by a straight flight of steps to a large platform about five feet high; from

each end of which there is a circular flight, which traverses the circular wall and meets in a platform at the top. The stairway leads to a lobby (on the second floor) thirty-five feet square, having the well-hole of the stairs (which is enclosed in an iron railing) in the centre. From this lobby there are doors communicating with the several apartments of the second story. This part of the building is arched with a spandrel dome, the angular spaces are filled with pendentives, terminating in a circular ring, on which a cylindrical wall is built, supporting the Cupola. The interior of the dome is finished with raised panels and ornamented with stucco, superbly executed; and produces that pleasing magic effect usual with a vast concave in such a situation.

"The Senate Chamber is on the second floor in the front part of the house; being thirty-three feet broad by sixty-two feet long; having a spacious lobby with elevated seats at one end, separated from the Chamber by two Ionic columns and proper antia; supporting a full entablature; the frieze and cornice continued entirely around the room; the ceiling richly ornamented with square sunk panels. The floor is covered with a rich durable carpet, made in the Penitentiary; and is occupied by the mahogany chairs and tables of the Senators.

"The Representative Hall is in the opposite end of the second story, being forty-eight feet broad and sixty-two feet long, and having a lobby and gallery on the south side of the room. The ceiling of this room is also elegantly finished with square sunk panels and other ornaments in stucco. Behind the speaker's chair hangs an elegant full length portrait of Lafayette, executed by Jewett, at the order of the State.

"The building was commenced in the Spring of 1827, and finished in the Fall of 1830; and cost ninety-five thousand dollars".

Daniel M. Bowmar, Managing Editor of the "Woodford Sun", Versailles, Kentucky, quotes the following:

"General James Wilkerson, by deed in the Woodford County Clerk's office, conveyed to Andrew Holmes a body of land 'including the town of Frankfort'. In another old deed, Andrew Holmes conveys to the State the site of the first permanent capitol building in Frankfort".

In these halls the political history of Kentucky was enacted for nearly eighty years, and in them has been heard the oratory of hundreds of distinguished Kentuckians. Henry Clay, George M. Bibb, John J. Crittenden, James T. Morehead, Joseph R. Underwood, Thomas Metcalfe, Archibald Dixon, John B. Thompson, Lazarus Powell, John C. Breckinridge, Garret Davis, James Guthrie, James B. Beck, John S. Williams, J. C. S. Blackburn, John G. Carlisle, James B. McCreary, William Lindsay, Thomas H. Paynter, William O. Bradley and all Kentucky United States Senators elected by the Legislature up to the time the change in the mode of election was adopted, were elected in this building.

The Constitutional Convention of 1849-50, and 1892, held their sessions here, and the Border States Convention in an attempt to preserve peace between the sections of the country, met in the building from May 27 to June 3, 1861.

During a very brief occupation of Frankfort by Confederate Troops in October, 1862, Richard Hawes was inaugurated "Provisional Governor" of Kentucky under the Confederate Government. This ceremony, which took place in the Old State House, was interrupted by the approach of Federal troops who drove the Confederates from the scene, and replaced the Stars and Stripes on the dome of the building, from which the flag had been taken down.

All Governors of Kentucky since 1829, with the exception of two, were inaugurated in the building or on its grounds, until 1911.

The building was closed for several years after the new Capitol was completed in 1909, and a portion of it opened for the use of the Frankfort Public Library for a few years. When the United States went into the World War in 1917, it was used for the Government Shirt Depot, and so used until the end of the War.

In the summer of 1920, after having been repaired and made suitable for the purpose, the building became the home of the Kentucky State Historical Society, which has its Museum in the old Senate and Representative Halls, and the Library and Archives Departments on the first floor.

L. M. Grimes

Revised 1936, H.C.F.

Addendum To:
STATE HOUSE, OLD
Broadway, bounded by Madison,
Clinton and Lewis Streets
Frankfort
Franklin County
Kentucky

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127